



News Release

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Media Contacts:

Stephen P. McDonald

Utah Department of Health

801-538-7099

Bob Ballew

Davis County Health Department

801-451-3501

Study Finds Cancer Rates Not Higher for Residents Living Near Hill Air Force Base

(Salt Lake City, UT) – A study released by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) concludes that cancer rates are not higher for residents living over contaminated groundwater plumes in communities surrounding Hill Air Force Base.

Conducted at the request of the Davis County Health Department, researchers looked at cancer rates in areas surrounding the base from 1973 through 2001. Other types of health problems were not studied.

“We are pleased this study’s results indicate that people living on or near the plumes do not appear to be at increased risk for cancer,” says Lewis Garrett, director, Davis County Health Department. “Nevertheless, the plumes are a major environmental concern in Davis County. We will continue to monitor the overall health of county residents and track the base’s long-term clean up progress through our active participation on their Restoration Advisory Board.”

Groundwater was contaminated with trichloroethylene (TCE) and other solvents used at Hill Air Force Base for maintenance purposes. Though the contaminated groundwater is not in the drinking water supply, residents can be exposed to chemical vapors getting into basements. Environmental studies by the base have shown there is minimal exposure to the contamination in the groundwater for the residents living over the plumes. Hill Air Force Base has an ongoing program to monitor and eventually clean up the contamination.

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TCE, tetrachloroethylene, and carbon tetrachloride are thought to be associated with several kinds of cancers. However, cancers associated with those chemicals were not found to be elevated among residents living over the contaminated groundwater plumes.

“Cancers are more common than most people think,” says Dr. Wayne Ball, Manager of the UDOH’s Environmental Epidemiology Program that conducted the study.

“Approximately half of men and one-third of women will get some form of cancer in their lifetime. Exposure to environmental toxicants account for only a small percentage of cancer cases.”

Ball explained that most cancers are related to lifestyle choices, such as smoking, unhealthy diet or unprotected exposure to sunlight. Other risk factors include infectious diseases, genetics, occupational risks, radiation, and unsafe use of industrial or household chemical products.

State and local health officials encourage all Utah residents to be cancer aware and make healthy lifestyle choices. Persons over 40 years old are encouraged to get regular physical exams that include cancer counseling and screening and to participate in cancer screening clinics.

For information about cancer screening programs call the UDOH health resource line at 1-888-222-2542.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.